

Balfour Project

PEACE, JUSTICE AND EQUAL RIGHTS
IN ISRAEL/PALESTINE

Welcome to the second edition of our quarterly newsletter. All of us at the Balfour Project wish you, your families, and friends a Happy New Year.

The immediate outlook for the cause that drives us on every day – the search for peace, justice, and equal rights for Palestinians and Israelis alike – may not look so bright at present. But we are heartened by the knowledge that the Balfour Project forms part of a grassroots movement around the world that grows stronger by the day. At home we are trying to build coalitions of support from among followers of all major faiths and political parties, as well as unaffiliated individuals. The results of our collective work are becoming tangible.

As 2023 begins, the contours of the daunting challenges on the ground in Palestine/Israel and in the UK in responding to those realities have already emerged in sharp relief. As so much has been said and written about the new, extreme right-wing Netanyahu government in Israel, there is little for us to add by way of insights into what can be expected from it. De facto annexation of the remaining Palestinian land will advance apace as the self-declared “landlords” of the territory flex their muscles ever more aggressively. What is less clear, and thus gives grounds for modest hope, is how robustly the international community will react.

Britain’s decision on 30 December to vote against the UN General Assembly’s referral of the occupation to the International Court of Justice for a legal opinion on its consequences was deeply regrettable. But it should not have come as a complete surprise. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak was merely following in the footsteps of all previous occupants of No.10 when it comes to Britain’s partisanship on the Israel-Palestine question and its failure. Further tests of the government’s integrity and commitment to legal accountability for all lie ahead in the coming months. Separate commissions of inquiry set up by the UN Human Rights Council and the International Criminal Court into abuses in the occupied Palestinian territory are also hard at work. Their findings will be debated and voted on.

As a general election is due in Britain within the next two years, the Balfour Project needs to focus its energies on the possible difference in policies towards Palestine/Israel that a change of government could bring. For obvious political reasons, Keir Starmer wishes to distinguish himself and the Labour Party he leads from everything that Jeremy Corbyn represented, including the latter’s ardent support for the Palestinian cause. We should not therefore expect to hear much from Labour’s leadership about Palestinian rights in the coming period. But we can hope that underneath the public positioning taking place as the election approaches, decent, principled British politicians from all parties – and we know there are many – recognise that what Israel is doing to the Palestinians today is not only deeply wrong. It is fundamentally contrary to British values and the country’s long-term interests.



A word
from
our
Chair

Andrew Whitley

Chair of the Balfour Project Board of Trustees

Our Position on Palestine/Israel

The Balfour Project’s mission is to work for equal rights for everyone in Israel-Palestine, support self-determination for the Palestinian people, and explore and publicise Britain’s historic and continuing responsibilities. We advocate Britain’s recognition of Palestine as a state. We do so, with wide Palestinian support, and an overwhelming vote in favour of recognition by British Members of Parliament in 2014. We are sure that recognition of a Palestinian state would substantially improve the Palestinians’ position in all international forums and enhance their bargaining strengths and status. Our advocacy of a Palestinian state does not mean that the Balfour Project takes a position on final status for the Palestine-Israel question, such as one-state, two-state or any other formula. This will be a matter for the Israelis and Palestinians to negotiate in a fair, internationally supervised process.

2022/23 Fellowship Programme Update

Our Peace Advocacy Fellowship has recruited 16 Fellows for the 2022-23 programme – the biggest cohort since the programme began four years ago. This year, we have nine masters students, six final year undergraduates and one PhD student. Geographically, the Fellows span the UK, studying in London, Durham, Oxford, Leeds, Cambridge, Edinburgh, and Belfast.

The Fellows are working in groups on six projects:

- Creating an exhibition of photographs that shows contemporary human stories from Israel and Palestine
- Exploring the relationship between international law and free trade agreements
- Creating educational resources to facilitate the study of environmental issues in Israel/Palestine
- Developing resources to enhance the debate over the Recognition of Palestine by the UK Government
- Building on the Masafer Yatta campaign through personal contacts and interactions with UK groups
- Extending the scope of our workshop on history A-level teaching to include broader use of sources and a wider historical perspective.



Our Fellows retreat at Ewen Mill, hosted by Nicolas Pelham

The programme began in October, when the Fellows participated in a series of briefings and lectures. John McHugo, one of our Trustees, who has decades of experience as an international lawyer, offered a workshop on the legal basis for the creation and termination of the British Mandate in Palestine; Hannah Weisfeld, the Director of Yachad, briefed Fellows on the politics and differing perspectives of Britain's Jewish community; and Sir Vincent Fean, our Vice-Chair, explained how the British government makes decisions on Middle East policy.

In late November, Fellows attended an in-person weekend retreat in Gloucestershire. This was an opportunity for Fellows to meet face-to-face, develop relationships, share ideas, and begin to work on their annual projects in earnest. They received training in project development and management from Matan Rosenstrauch and Martha Scott-Cracknell, who both oversee the Fellows programme. In the weeks ahead, the Fellows will be attending workshops on the psychology of conflict and on writing skills, while continuing to fulfil their project objectives.

To find out more about the Fellows, their studies and interests, visit the [Meet the Fellows](#) page.



On November 16, Pyla Bird-Leakey spoke at the Balfour Project's annual Supporters' Dinner about her experience as a Fellow on the 2021/22 programme. Pyla had been working with Douglas Gerrard to highlight facts about the Israeli government's demolition of the Palestinian village Masafer Yatta and the expulsion of its residents, and to strengthen relations between residents in Masafer Yatta and communities in the UK with the aim of providing solidarity and support to the residents. Pyla and Gerrard spearheaded a letter writing campaign that led to 10,000 letters being written to British MPs. Pyla is currently working on a PhD that entails reviewing decisions of the Israeli Supreme Court in the context of international law. Douglas is writing a thesis on the invisibility of the Israeli occupation of Palestine in Israeli political discourse.

Spring Conference on Human Rights

Our annual conference will be held on Wednesday May 17 2023 and will be entitled [Human Rights in Palestine: Responsibility and Accountability](#). This is particularly timely, because this year marks significant 75 year anniversaries for both Palestinians (the Nakba, the Catastrophe) and Israelis (the creation of the State of Israel), anniversaries set against a background of an increasingly turbulent political situation, escalating violence and continuing denial of Palestinian human rights.

The conference brings together a range of distinguished speakers, including those with direct experience of day-to-day reality in Palestine, and young Palestinian thinkers and activists close to civil society developments.

The aim is to analyse the current situation on the ground including the legal framework of the Occupation, Britain's role both during the mandate and now, and what actions we and the international community can and should take, individually and collectively, to advance equality between Palestinians and Israelis and to ensure responsibility is identified and accountability required for continuing abuses of fundamental human rights.

The conference will be "hybrid" – face to face at Church House, Westminster, and online. Ticket information to be announced shortly.

Future Events

[WEBINAR: Matthew Hughes - British Pacification in Mandate Palestine, 1936-39](#)

Thursday 23 February 3pm UK

Matthew Hughes is Chair of military history at Brunel University London. His most recent book is Britain's Pacification of Palestine: the British Army, the Colonial State and the Arab Revolt, 1936-39, and was published by Cambridge University Press in 2019.

[WEBINAR: Matthew Teller - Jerusalem and the British: 200 turbulent years](#)

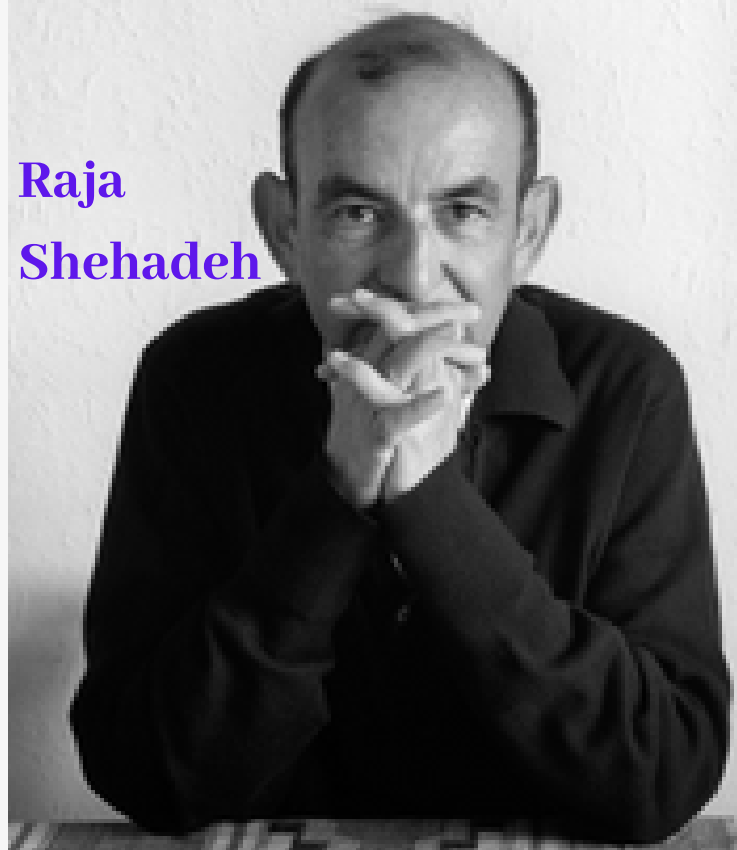
Thursday 30 March 3pm UK

Matthew Teller's "Nine Quarters of Jerusalem: A New Biography of the Old City" (Profile Books, 2022) was named a Book of the Year by the Daily Telegraph. Matthew writes for the BBC, Guardian, Independent, Times, Financial Times and other global media. He has produced and presented documentaries for BBC Radio 4 and World Service, and has reported for Radio 4's 'From Our Own Correspondent' from the Middle East and beyond.

Information about all our events can be found in the [Future Events](#) section of our website.

Take a Look at our Recent Events

Raja
Shehadeh



[Raja Shehadeh in conversation with Tim Llewellyn](#)

about his new book, *We could have been friends my father and I*. Raja Shehadeh is a lawyer and the founder of the human rights organisation, Al Haq. Here he speaks to veteran BBC journalist Tim Llewellyn about his latest book, which describes his family's experience of the British Mandate, the Jordanian period of annexation from 1948 to 1967, and the Israeli Occupation since 1967.

[Palestine and the football World Cup](#) There was no Palestinian national football team at the World Cup, but did you see players from other countries brandishing the Palestinian flag? We brought together Omar Karmi, a Palestinian-British journalist, and Tamir Sorek, an expert on Palestinian/Israeli football, to discuss and explain the high profile that Palestine enjoyed during the matches in Qatar.

[Oh little town of Bethlehem](#) Revd Dr Munther Isaac of Bethlehem Bible College describes the challenges facing Palestinians and Palestinian Christians in Israel/Palestine. Originally screened just before Christmas, Revd Isaac's presentation shows the wide gap between popular perception of the Holy Land and the reality on the ground, not just at Christmas, but throughout the year.

Recordings of all our past webinars can be found in the [Recorded Talks](#) part of the Events section of our website. The audio recordings can also be listened to on Spotify, Apple Podcast or wherever you listen to your podcasts.

Become our Friend

If you donate regularly to the Balfour Project, you automatically become one of our 'Friends'.

Friends receive a range of benefits such as discounted tickets to our Spring Conference, free tickets for our film screenings and free copies of our conference booklets. We also offer Friends the opportunity to get directly involved in our work through meetings with our Trustees and officers. Our last Friends/Trustees meeting, led by our Trustees' Chair, Andrew Whitley, and Executive Committee Chair, Sandra Hamrouni, was held in November 2022, by video; but in 2023 we hope to be able to also do these meetings face to face.

We know that our supporters' financial circumstances differ widely. We recommend £5 or £10 a month, but there is no minimum donation – any regular amount will make you a Friend. And remember that donations made by Friends are eligible for Gift Aid, entitling us to claim a further 25% on your donation, at no cost to you. So please tick the Gift Aid box of you are a UK taxpayer.

If you sign up to be our Friend in February, you will be eligible, along with all our current Friends, to attend the next Friends Meeting with Phyllis Starkey (Trustee and chair of Conference Committee), Richard Burden (Trustee and former MP) and Sandra Hamrouni (chair of the Executive Committee) at 6pm GMT on Tuesday, February 28. More information to follow.

To take the next step, [click here](#).

Thank you for your support!

What We Do With Your Money

The Balfour Project is funded through donations. As a result, we are intensely conscious of the need to deploy our funds wisely and efficiently. Most of our executives are volunteers and we spend no money on office space. We employ three programme officers who work part time on our programme of events, our publications and website, and our Fellows Programme. We occasionally hire specialised consultants to help on particular matters, such as social media outreach. As a result, salaries account for about one third of our total expenditure, and more than 90 per cent of what we spend goes directly to core activities such as events, publications and advocacy.

Explore the Website

Whether you are interested in the history of Israel/Palestine or the latest developments, the Balfour Project's website is an invaluable resource. Take a look at the [History](#) section for a detailed timeline, copies of key documents relating to the British involvement in Palestine, as well as a wealth of material on the Balfour Declaration. For those with an interest in current events, there's the [News](#) section and a digest of statements by the UK government ministers describing the UK Position on recent events in Israel/Palestine. We also have a [Resources](#) page for teachers and others engaged in educational projects related to Israel/Palestine. There's plenty more, including details on [future](#) and [recent Events](#), so do take a look.

Ian Black

Andrew Whitley writes: Ian Black, the veteran Middle East journalist for The Guardian and Visiting Senior Fellow at the LSE Middle East Centre, has died at the age of 69 of a rare neurological disorder. Fluent in Hebrew and Arabic, Ian was a contemporary of mine in Jerusalem as journalists covering the first Palestinian intifada. His deep understanding of the roots of the conflict led to a masterful book *Enemies and Neighbours*; its publication coincided with the centenary of the Balfour Declaration in 2017. In his review Menachem Klein wrote: the Declaration "frames the unresolved conflict and its impact continues to reverberate."

